

## Firmness of Resolve to Do... And Do Without Delay:

### *Uttitthe Na Ppamajjeyya*

*Bhikkhu Dhammavihari*

It would not be untrue if we said that one could hardly find in the Pali language, i.e. the language of one of the earliest versions of extant Buddhist texts, a word with greater relevance to social dynamics than the word *uttitthe*. Literally it means ' Rise up '. It is indeed the matrix of numerous socially powerful and spiritually wholesome concepts in Buddhism. *Uttitthe* is impregnated with the idea of ' the resolve, together with the capacity, to do something wholesome expeditiously '. When Alavaka, a yakkha chieftain who is highly respected for his qualities of leadership in the society of the Buddha's day, asked the Buddha as to what makes a man affluent [*Kathamsu vindate dhanam*], the Buddha's reply was ' it is an energetic man with a firm resolve to act who gathers wealth' [*Uttihāta vindate dhanam*].

The verse no. 25 of the Dhammapada reminds us, on the other hand, that it is a man of culture with a firm resolve who also gains an unassailable spiritual foothold in life from whence he would not easily be torn off his moorings [*yaṃ ogho nābhikīrati*].

*Uttihānena 'ppamādena samyamena damena ca  
dīpaṃ kayirātha medhāvī yaṃ ogho nābhikīrati.*

We believe we do not need to brief you here any further on the religio-cultural richness and grandeur of the verb *uttitthati* [= readily rises into action] which immediately implies the presence and the possession of 'firm resolve', coupled undeniably with soundness of judgement and decency and propriety of what one does with such resolve.

In the world to-day, both in the east and the west, what we call the process of change has been seriously over-accelerated. Change, we know is real. Buddhists, more than most others, should know it better. That is contained in their basically fundamental concept of *anicca*. It is also change, which at the same time is well motivated and wholesomely set in motion, as in genetic manipulation, which brings about the desirable process of evolution. On the other hand, unmethodical and un contemplated as well as haphazard change leads to serious decay and deterioration. The former, we would call *vuddhi* or growth. The latter is stigmatized as *parihāni* which is known as decay or decline.

Taking serious note of this eternally present disastrous aspect of change, the wiser men and women of our society take steps to arrest and come to terms with this process. We may even call it a process of sublimation. Whether it be in the material things of the world like items of food and drink we take or own physical bodies, or in other less tangible spheres like morals and manners of men and women, the need to resolve to handle and to arrest this process calls for immediate attention. If Buddhists, well and truly, are real serious thinkers and be less like automatons or actors on a fast revolving stage, they cannot fail to take note of the Buddhist warning to 'take heed of this contaminating and devastating process of change' which we, in our own terms, call *kilissati* and *saṅkilissati*. They both mean become contaminated and lose the character of being desirable and wholesome. Hence *kilesa*, or *keles* in Sinhala becomes such a religiously significant word with the Buddhists.

When we associate this process of contamination and deterioration with food and drink, we immediately turn in the direction of freezers and refrigerators for cold storage of items like milk and milk products, meats and vegetables. With our own bodies, we become, or are made to become, aware of the need for antibiotics and vitamins and other forms of medication to arrest various forms of deterioration. In the verse we quoted above, no.25 of the Dhammapada, we referred to the danger of being torn off our moorings [*yaṃ ogho nābhikīratī*]. That

is specifically the area of morals and manners of men and women, not forgetting our children too, as we go on. We are moored and are kept tethered in diverse healthy and safe positions through these conventional agreements, i.e. morals or ethics or norms or by whatever name we refer to them. All over the world people respect these, both to preserve their healthy identities and to be of mutual acceptability in the larger human context.

Social solidarity is a definite by-product of this faithful adherence to regional [or may even be universal] moral values. Within a frame work of local religious morals, thousands of teen-age girls in the USA came out to reject pre-marital sex. It was ten thousand in 1995. It should be a great deal more now. They insist that sex is worth waiting for. Do the Buddhist girls in this country [or even non-Buddhist ones], whether they go to national or international schools, or even their much older parents know that according to Buddhism, sex is worth waiting for. Have they ever heard or learnt in their own young days about the existence of the concept of pre-marital chastity or *komāra-brahmacariya*? In our country, it is best that these ideas trickle downwards from the leadership above. If people here or elsewhere wish to know, it is all in the third precept of *pañcasīla* which prohibits *kāmesu micchācārā*. Many in this country who administer this precept still vociferously insist that it covers the entire range of five pleasures of the senses [*pas kam sapa*]. Many Sri Lankan scholars, monks and laymen, in their well-authored books, slip into this same blunder. We do not need a Panadura Debate to put such howlers right. If any do need to know, we will reveal where the mistakes are, sometimes in very high class English publications.

With the firmness of resolve or *utthāna* to do something wholesome, which we are enthusiastically recommending herewith on this Poya day, and in consonance with the verse we have quoted at the very outset, there are two very contributory concepts in *samyama* and *dama*. Two good words, we believe, with which to translate these are **self-discipline** and **self-correction**. In the idea of discipline or *samyama*, we see a concept of gathering oneself together or total

utilization of energy available within oneself. Nothing is allowed to be diffused or go waste. Or put it differently, it would be maximization of one's potential. To do this, one must see in it a purpose and usefulness. We believe loving friendliness or *mettā* which is one of the highly valued virtues in Buddhism can be an unflinching driving force behind this, underlying beneath it. When one is capable of viewing the entire world of living things as not being different from oneself, there invariably arises within oneself the need to make oneself an inoffensive wholesome being, a being whose existence is no cause of annoyance or irritation to others: *averam̐ asapattam̐*. For no one likes offense or to be offended: *sabbe tasanti danḍassa*.

*Dama*, on the other hand, as self-correction requires judgement and investigation with regard to one's acceptability by the rest of society. It is invariable that the world expects us to be *sappurisā*, i.e. persons who are not a danger and not a menace to the world they live in. In very broad terms we should say, a world including both the animate and the inanimate. People are required to conform to patterns of propriety in their behaviour. *Dama* in Buddhism implies our desire and our endeavour to restrain, control and subdue ourselves in this manner to bring about maximum happiness, and least injury, to ourselves and to those others in whose midst we live.

In terms of notions of good and bad, i.e. *kusala* and *akusala* or *puñña* and *pāpa* which are inculcated in us through Buddhism, we are required to discipline our minds, i.e. our *citta*, or the way we think. Several verbal forms are used to cover this. It is fascinating to note the vast range of words they use. Note the use of the verb *dameti* = restrains. They speak of *cittassa damatho sādhu*, meaning 'the restraint of the mind is wholesome'. That is declared to be a primary source of happiness or *sukhāvaham̐*: *cittam̐ dantam̐ sukhāvahm̐*. This is at Dhammapada verse no. 35. Then they use the verb *rakkhati* at verse no. 36 which means guards or protects. *Cittam̐ rakkhetha medhāvī*: A wise person shall protect his mind. The word *samyama* which means control, the word with which

we almost started this study, is used in verse no. 37 in terms of mind-discipline. *Ye cittam samyamessanti mokkhanti māra-bandhanā*. Its verdict is: They who gain control over their minds triumph over death [literally 'are freed from the fetters of death'].

This is the culture pattern which Buddhism, as a religion and a philosophy, gifts to the world, not only for the edification of mankind here and now, for their own glorification as dignified human beings with a real down to earth existence but also for the fulfillment of a purpose beyond death, which all Buddhists dearly hold onto with an unshakable conviction. This belief, it must be emphatically pointed out, is truly a good driving force for moral and good ethical living in this very existence. This what makes the Buddhist law of karma meaningful.

If Buddhism is to serve as a religion to mankind or as a spiritual force in the world as the Master himself expected it to be, then this is the context in which it must well and truly operate. Prayers and mantras, no matter in what form or where they are used, or Bodhi Pujas or Hatara Devales, chantings or chanted objects, they will all be only peripheral, well outside the religious earnestness of the process of release through enlightenment or *bodhi*.

In the world to-day, at the turn of the century or at the commencement of the new millennium, the third, Buddhism certainly is and has indeed to be, a great deal more than a country religion or an ethnic one. It is already showing what it is going to be. To His Holiness the Dalai Lama of the Tibetans, to the vast majority of people of Chinese origin and to most custodians of Buddhism in Japan like the Rissho Hosei Kai, Buddhism is the religion of Shakyamuni, the historical Buddha of India, of the sixth century B.C. They have all well nigh left behind their provincialisms. Forget not your origins as well as their limitations. This new wave of thinking is gaining momentum in the world every day. Sri Lankans cannot afford to be oblivious to this. Time and tide waits for no man's pleasures. To resist this is to sink and be swallowed up.